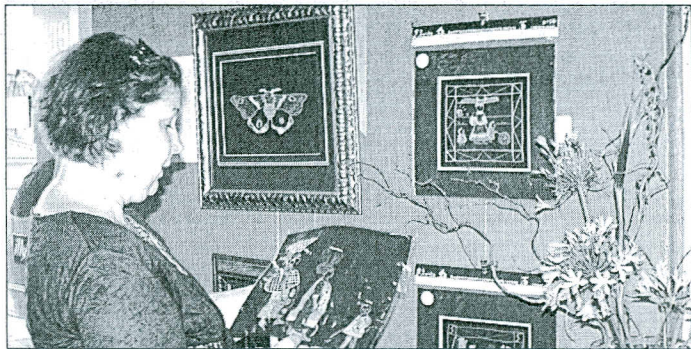




SME Unit Director Michael Zwane (c) making his remarks. He is flanked by the PS at the DPM's office Khangeziwe Mabuza and USA Ambassador Earl Irving.



Alliance Francaise Swaziland Director Laurence admiring some of the products which are on exhibition. (Pics: Simon Shabangu)



The guests and Litsemba members listening to speeches.



Sibongile Nhleko who is representing women in the board of directors with Managing Director Elliot Magongo.



Archie Magwaza flanked by Nokukhanya Gamedze (r) and Laurence.

Mtiya Threads transforms to sustainable social business

By Simon Shabangu

MTIYA Threads has since transformed itself from a general organisation to a fully-fledged company trading as Litsemba.

The latest developments were announced by Board of Directors Chairman Archie Magwaza during the company's launch held at the Art Gallery, Comm recently. The event also marked the launch of Mtiya's first exhibition, which is currently ongoing at the gallery.

The company has since identified an active Board of Directors whose members represent a wide range of interests, from entrepreneurial and business experience to others.

Representatives include former Senator Nokukhanya Gamedze while Magwaza, who is an art fanatic and director of the Art Gallery, chairs it and Elliot Magongo has been engaged as managing director to support the company's transition from informal set-up to sustainable social business and the introduction of management and operational procedures from a recognised accounting system to costing exercises.

Quality

"The first stage of widening product offering has been completed and the development for a new, high-end range of products is in process that aims to raise the value of already high quality embroidery," said Magwaza.

"Litsemba is now a registered section 21 company whose shareholders are the rural Swazi women that it serves. The establishment of a staff has been identified from those women already working with Litsemba, whose roles reflect the three main strategic areas of importance; finance, administration, sales and marketing, and production."

He said financial support to kick start Litsemba was solicited from the people of the United States of America through the African

"... Litsemba is now a registered section 21 company whose shareholders are the rural Swazi women that it serves"



Chairman of Litsemba Archie Magwaza presenting a cake to members of the company during its launch at Art Gallery recently. The event was also to mark the launch of an exhibition of Umtiya products and the birth of Litsemba.

Development Fund (ADF) backstopped by the Regional Excellence and Development Initiative (REDI).

Adding, Magwaza said the company already had established partners within Swaziland and South Africa who distribute the ever increasing and exciting range of Litsemba products. "We have established a product catalogue and a website from whence to launch itself into the international market," he said.

Meanwhile, Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Unit Director Michael Zwane said government was excited at the latest developments which he described as a sign of growth, initiatives government supports and encourages. He pledged the commerce min-

istry's support to the new company.

US Ambassador also congratulated the company owners - the women - for taking the organisation to another level and pledged continued support to them through the embassy's African Development Fund and TechnoServe, both organisations under USA agencies meant to empower locals with business skills and financially.

Ravaged

Litsemba currently supports about 150 rural women from five very impoverished, drought and AIDS ravaged communities from eastern Swaziland; Ngomane, Lusoti, Mpolonjeni, Matseta and Mpaka. The women embroider at home, meet as groups weekly with a Litsemba field officer to fellowship and to

appraise as well as pre-qualify finished embroidered art pieces.

The finished quality pieces are taken by Litsemba office staff, which turns them into finished products which are then packaged, marketed and sold. Currently, these products range from traditional blocks, mounted blocks, cushion covers, quilts, aprons, shopper bags, conference bags, lady's bags, passport bags, cellphone and spectacle pouches as well as pencil or vanity bags.

A new range of cushion covers, table runners and clutch bags are in development to target the high end market. With TechnoServe's involvement, Litsemba has accessed local and regional markets mostly focusing on outlets situated on well-known tourist routes. Sales have been increasing steadily with the widening of the product offering, reflecting the successful introduction of a management structure and formalised staff roles and responsibilities.

Generated

Litsemba relies on the generosity of its special sponsors, but has now begun a process to transition into a viable business reliant on its own resources and income it generates. All profits generated by Litsemba through its business activities are reinvested into the company and the women it represents. The profit also goes into assisting the women to improve the quality of their lives through business activity.

As a result, Litsemba commits to produce and sell superior quality and exquisite hand-embroidered handicraft and art pieces, commits to customer care and to continuous upward development of their life skills through regular training, and commits to making meaningful contribution to the communities within which it is established.

Litsemba is situated at the Swazi Secrets factory shell in Mpaka and its products are found in different outlets across the country. These include Ziggy's at Gona Rural complex in Malkerns, Baobab Batik at Swazi Candles complex, Tintsaba Retail Outlets, Galdolf Ceramics - Ngwenya Glass complex, Riverside Cafe - Big Bend, Living in Africa, African Fantasy, Guava Gallery, Big Game Parks, Emoya, Inala Vickery Seedlings and The Art Gallery, Comm.